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DEPT FOR EUR DAS BRYZA AND EUR/CARC

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [GG](#)  
SUBJECT: DAS BRYZA MEETS WITH REPUBLICAN USUPASHVILI

REF: TBILISI 271

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: On May 9, EUR DAS Matthew Bryza, the Ambassador, and EU Special Representative Peter Semneby met with Republican Party Chairman David Usupashvili. Usupashvili said that democratic development is currently stalled. His prediction that Parliamentary Speaker Burjanadze would lose power had come true. Now, the hard-liners in the United National Movement (UNM) have free reign. He believed the UNM could produce any result it desired on May 21, allowing 2-3 groups into Parliament in the coming election, but not the Republicans. Still, Usupashvili said another revolution is possible. Usupashvili acknowledged that no one else could currently lead the country better than President Saakashvili. He predicted further UNM consolidation of power and more opposition protests. Semneby said the EU is watching events in Georgia closely and will look to ODIHR to judge the election process.  
End summary.

Republicans in Weak Position  
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12. (C) On May 9, EUR DAS Matthew Bryza, the Ambassador, and EU Special Representative Peter Semneby met Chairman of the Republican Party, David Usupashvili. EUR/CARC Conflicts Advisor Michael Carpenter also attended. Usupashvili claimed that the political situation in Georgia has worsened, both internally and externally. He said the Republicans' difficult situation (they are polling only at around 2 percent, nationally) is a result of its attempt to mediate with the government earlier this year (reftel). According to Usupashvili, his party was seen as trying to save Saakashvili, rather than bring him down with the rest of the opposition. Now they are targeted by both sides, according to Usupashvili. He said the Joint Opposition (including the United National Council (UNC) and New Rightists) is also pushing this view, because if they defeat the Republicans it will give them more seats. Usupashvili said his party receives financial support from only one individual in their party (Valery Gelashvili, former MP now living in Lithuania), since five major donors quit under what he claimed was UNM pressure. He also said that most of the opposition parties were receiving funds from various individuals and groups in Russia, including former Adjara strongman Aslan Abashidze.

Usupashvili Forecast Burjanadze's Demise  
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13. (C) Usupashvili told Bryza that two months earlier, in Washington, he had pointed to 3 of 17 crucial UNC demands (reftel) necessary to avoid the political gridlock in Georgia today. He said without these demands, the Republicans would be out of politics and Burjanadze's moderate influence in the UNM would diminish. Usupashvili said he feared he had not adequately conveyed the message. With Burjanadze now out, he said the hardliners in the UNM have free reign to push their

agenda without being checked by moderates such as Burjanadze.

Meanwhile, Usupashvili said, polarization between the UNM and UNC continues to increase.

#### Says Saakashvili Broke Word on Majoritarian Seats

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14. (C) As evidence of a broken political process, Usupashvili pointed to the new 75-75 makeup of Parliament (between Majoritarian and Party List seats). Usupashvili said that with this constitutional amendment, Saakashvili broke his word in order to benefit himself and the UNM, at the cost of further restricting Georgian democracy. Asked by Bryza if the single-mandate majoritarian seats were not democratic, Usupashvili said in a normal situation they would be. However, he said, given Georgia's difficult and corrupt past, breaking an agreement that had been underway for months and pitting people face-to-face in bitter political battles is only going to further degrade Georgian politics. He said not everyone, including some in the UNM and in the Joint Opposition, is committed to democracy. The Ambassador said that members of the government claim they never gave final agreement to a "proportional representational" majoritarian system. Usupashvili countered that common drafts on the electoral system had been circulated in Parliament for months prior to the February agreement.

#### UNM Positioned to Dictate Terms of Win

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15. (C) Usupashvili alleged that the UNM could produce any result it desired for the May 21 election. He claimed the

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UNM plans to allow 2-3 groups into Parliament in the coming election to provide an image of fairness, but not allow the Republicans. (Note: Usupashvili did not detail how he drew this conclusion. End note.)

#### Protests Likely, Revolution Plausible

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16. (C) Because of the UNM's manipulation, and the Joint Opposition's calls for protests, Usupashvili believes the ground is again fertile for a revolution as in 2003. He said the Joint Opposition leaders promised the people to do something in January, and now they will have to deliver. If hundreds of thousands of people demonstrate against the government, Usupashvili said even Burjanadze could tap into this popular discontent to gain power. Usupashvili lamented his judgment during the prior negotiations, saying he learned too late that Saakashvili and the UNM would not allow a reasonable, effective opposition to form in the Parliament. He acknowledged that Saakashvili is currently the only effective leader of the executive branch in Georgia, but said the executive branch must be checked by Parliament for democracy to develop. Based on this evolving political process of the UNM further consolidating power and radicalizing the opposition, Usupashvili forecast further turmoil in Georgia's democratic process.

#### Semneby Looks to ODIHR

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17. (C) Semneby acknowledged Usupashvili's broken faith in the negotiating process and said it appeared both the government and opposition need to engage in soul-searching in Georgia's democratic interests. Semneby also indicated that the discrepancy in the size of the 75 single-mandate majoritarian districts could lead to problems for Georgia. He said the EU is watching internal events and Abkhazia closely to keep things from getting out of hand. The Speaker of the Polish Senate will come to visit Georgia and offer support for continuing democratic development. In the end, Semneby said the EU will look to ODIHR for its assessment of the parliamentary elections. Usupashvili thanked Semneby, and

acknowledged the helpful importance of the ODIHR observers in the election process.

Comment

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¶8. (C) Comment: Usupashvili is obviously disappointed with his party's slipping public support, and this was evident during the conversation. Usupashvili remains among the most reasonable and thoughtful of the opposition leaders, but the most recent polling suggests that his party will not gain enough votes to enter into Parliament in the 75 party list seats. Like other opposition leaders, he has a tendency to see Georgia's polarized political process and the inability of the ruling party and opposition to reach agreement through negotiations as a failure of democracy, writ large, rather than a mundane partisan squabble common to all democracies. End comment.

¶9. (U) DAS Bryza has cleared this cable.  
TEFFT